UNITED
NATIONS

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Economic and Social
Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/CN.4/2000/NGO/56
8 February 2000

Original: ENGLISH

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Fifty-sixth session
Item 12 (a) of the provisional agenda

INTEGRATION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND THE GENDER PERSPECTIVE: VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Written statement submitted by the Organization for Defending Victims of Violence, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[1 January 2000]

GE.00-10640 (E)

1. The Organization for Defending Victims of Violence and its affiliated body, the Women's Rights Committee, would like to draw the attention of the Commission on Human Rights to the point that realization of women's rights is an important criterion in the development process of each country. In this regard, education, employment, sanitation and women's right to active political participation in their social life are among the most important indicators which show women's access to their own rights. Also, respecting women's dignity in a society is not separate from the realization of their rights. Noting that women include half of the population of human society, and since they are the mothers of the next generation, respecting their rights will guarantee the emergence of a better society. To this end, the Organization for Defending Victims of Violence has given special attention to the situation of women's rights. The organization has been among those which have participated in drafting the NGO report to the "Gathering of NGOs for Beijing Plus Five" and prepared the section on violence against women in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The organization has already opened up its Rehabilitation Centre for Victims of Social Violence with a priority for granting services to the women and children victims of social violence. The organization would like to draw the attention of the Commission to the situation of women in Iran, the United States of America, Afghanistan and Azerbaijan.

2. The situation of women's rights in the developing countries, including Iran, has its own special problems. On one hand, being apart from the political decision-making processes and, on the other hand, not enjoying proper education and training have caused Iranian women to be systematically removed from the political and social scenes. Of course, since the occurrence of the "23rd May Movement" following which President Khatami came to power, new viewpoints have emerged among government officials about women's role, and the women are more encouraged to participate in the society's affairs in comparison with the former Government. Although after the Revolution more women began educational and research activities than before, and somehow were represented actively at certain political and social decision-making levels, they still have a long long way ahead. Articles 3, 20 and 23 of the Constitution have specified some of the above-mentioned rights for women. Unfortunately, these provisions only emphasize the legal aspects of the family; however, there is also a need for the other aspects to be considered and, more importantly, the implementation of the laws should be regarded as a priority. It is a must for the Government of Iran to create the necessary bodies for monitoring the implementation of the related laws stipulated in the Constitution. Also, women's non-governmental organizations need to create more and more capacity.

3. Gender discrimination in the United States of America deserves the attention of the Commission on Human Rights. Women enjoy 50 per cent fewer job opportunities than men. Their salaries are not equal to those of men in the same job. The United States of America is one of two countries that have not yet ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Women in the United States do not live in security and the number of cases of the sexual abuse and aggression, is higher than in any other country. According to State statistics, about 18 per cent of women are being sexually abused. According to recent statistics of the International Labour Organization (ILO), occupational opportunities for women in the United States of America are worse than in 152 countries of the world.

4. One of the most significant examples among those countries in which women's rights are obviously ignored and violated is Afghanistan. Unfortunately, the violations of women's rights in this country have been mixed with certain ethnic and religious customs and beliefs and, as a result, inhuman restrictions are imposed on Afghani women. The arrest of a woman for "improper covering" or her presence out of her home without being accompanied by a male close relative - even a 10-year-old boy - is a usual thing in this country. After the Taliban came to power, women were deprived of their jobs, such as teaching, nursing, etc. - and their situation has worsened to the extent that they turned into weak persons who had to just deal with the housework. According to the report by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, in 1998, "the situation of Afghan women and girls, who make up more than half of the country's population, has been described as 'dire and dreadful', since they are effectively excluded from all aspects of the country's economic, social and political life, mainly in Taliban-controlled areas" (E/CN.4/1998/71, para. 17). The situation of women's rights in Afghanistan has reportedly worsened in 1999.

5. In the Republic of Azerbaijan, during recent years, women's problems have reached a critical level. Violence against women in this independent country has found an awful depth. According to the reports of the United Nations Development Programme , almost 40 per cent of Azerbaijani women are violated during their lives, either sentimentally, sexually or physically. In addition, about 32 per cent of women in their father's houses, 58 per cent in their spouse's homes and 10 per cent outside of their homes face these kinds of violence. Besides condemning the growing trend of violence against women, we urge the Government of Azerbaijan to become more committed to the existing international human rights standards, specially by respecting Azerbaijani women's rights through employing educational mechanisms, adopting proper laws for the protection and promotion of women's rights, providing legal support and defending the victims of violence, all of which can contribute to preventing the expansion of women's rights violations.